

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' BRIEFING

Welcome to Oxford Brookes

8th April
2022



INTRODUCTIONS

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The team behind the email (externals@brookes.ac.uk)

Samina Bashir

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ABOUT BROOKES

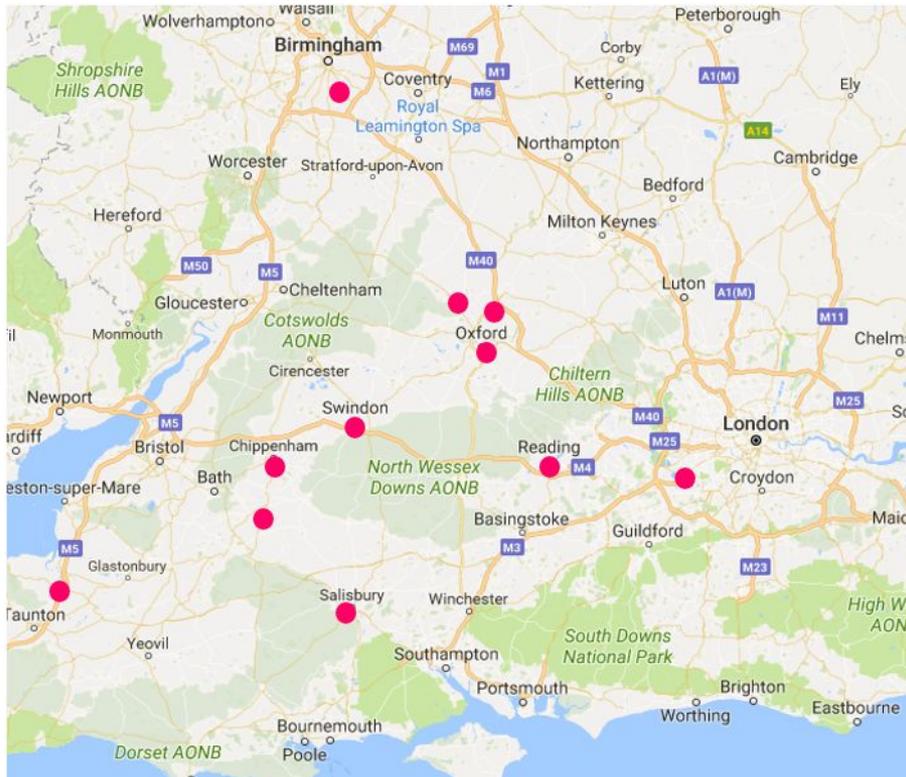
Liz Turner

Deputy Director of Academic & Student Administration
(Academic Policy & Regulation)

ABOUT OXFORD BROOKES

- Post-92 university - teaching and research
- Campuses in and around **Oxford** (Headington, Marston Rd, Harcourt Hill, Wheatley) and **Swindon**
- **4 Faculties:**
 - Oxford Brookes Business School (OBBS)
 - Health & Life Sciences (HLS)
 - Humanities & Social Sciences (HSS)
 - Technology, Design & Environment (TDE)
- Supported by Faculty and central administration teams (ASA)
- Many programmes accredited by **professional bodies**
- **18,000** students in total; around 20% EU/International; approx. 4,000 students studying for Brookes awards off campus
- **International** partnerships in many countries around the world, including Cayman Islands, China, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Kenya, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Switzerland - different delivery models
- **UK** collaborative taught programmes, mostly through the Associate College Partnership, and also with a number of specialist organisations

Oxford Brookes University College Partners



Typical ACP student:

- Non traditional HE student
- Mature - those who are working and or have caring responsibilities
- Those returning to education after a break
- Progression from sixth form/college

Why students may choose a partnership college course:

- Flexible entry requirements
- Lower tuition fees
- Small class sizes
- Benefit from resources at their college and OBU



“The foundation degree suits me perfectly as it allows me to study whilst fulfilling my full-time job, and my employer is developing a highly-qualified workforce for the future.”

AARON BRISCOE

**FdEng Mechanical Engineering, Abingdon and Witney College
Employer: BMW Group**



“Choosing to study an Early Years degree with Oxford Brookes at a partnership college was the right choice for me so I could further my professional development without having to travel, making study, work and family life achievable.”

CATHERINE HUGHES
FdA Early Years, Swindon College

FAIRLY RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

- **New academic framework**
 - review of UG programme structures (UMP) prompted by the introduction of a new student records system in 2019
 - implemented (for new entrants) in Sept 2020
 - move to more linear programme structure with more prescription of compulsory elements, and more focused options
 - move to discrete years of study (rather than Stage 1/Stage 2)
 - new progression rules and degree classification algorithm

This work led to:

- Regulations re-structure; policy/procedure reviews
- Review of GPA system (retaining, with better comms)
- Consideration of application of new rules on structure and progression to Foundation degree provision (retaining current rules)

CURRICULUM STRUCTURES

Bachelor's degree programmes - new UG framework from Sept 2020

- UMP (continuing students)
- 15 credit standard module size; pass mark 40%
- Compulsory v optional modules (choice increases through levels)
- Degree classification (L5:L6 weighting 25%: 75%)
- GPA (average of all modules from L4 to L6) - not applied to collaborative provision

Foundation degree programmes

- Mainly taught through ACP, with options to top up to Bachelor's degree
- Small cohorts; few options within programmes
- Award classification - Pass/Merit/Distinction, based on average module mark across L4/L5

Master's degree programmes

- 20 credit standard module size; pass mark 50%
- Variety of structures/credit/award requirements
- Award classification - Pass/Merit/Distinction, based on average module mark plus minimum mark in dissertation

Apprenticeships

CURRENT PRIORITIES

- New University Strategy (2035 vision) launched Dec 2020;
- Education and Enterprise Pillar - four key ambitions:
 1. Create globally relevant and purposeful educational experiences;
 2. Offer each student an individualised learning plan;
 3. Enable students to become successful, forward-thinking and enterprising graduates who contribute positively to society;
 4. Empowering students with the ability to recognise and seize opportunities through critical analysis and judgement.
- Inclusivity - new guiding principle in University Strategy - inclusive curriculum development (IDEAS) model
- Student engagement - learning analytics
- Review of the academic year
- Apprenticeships - preparing for Ofsted

Post-COVID Assessment and Feedback

Retaining the benefits of online delivery

Assessment and Feedback Policy focused on:

- programme level overviews and strategies for assessment;
- assessment as learning.

The support role for academic advisors.

Efficient assessment of learning outcomes - minimising the number of summative assignments.

Where-ever possible, rethinking the use of time constrained, summative examinations.

Supportive formative assessment, with clear rubrics and useful, timely feedback on learning and development needs.

Responding to OfS 'Assessment practices in English higher education providers'.

APPROACHES TO TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

Dr Rob Hayward

Head of Quality Assurance & Validations

Oxford Brookes Business School

TLA developments in OBBS

Mission & Vision - with strategies for each of the 4 pillars of the OBU strategy 2035

- Beginning the journey to AACSB accreditation

Golden Threads

- Enterprise pedagogy
- Employability
- Experiential
- Inclusive practice
- Sustainable & Ethical practice

TLA developments in OBBS continued

- **Programme and Level Learning Outcomes**
- 10 in total, 6 x generic across all programmes, 4 x distinctive
- Developed for each level (4 to 7), with modules mapped to them (AoL)
- Comparability between modules and between programmes
- Supports Admission with Credit, study exchanges, student mobility

Programme Level Assessment

An exciting time in OBBS!

THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S ROLE AT OBU

Liz Turner

Academic & Student Administration

<https://www.brookes.ac.uk/regulations/>

<https://www.brookes.ac.uk/asa/apqo/external-examining/>

<https://www.brookes.ac.uk/about-brookes/structure-and-governance/>

OUR EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

- We currently have **224** external examiners on our books (UG, PGT, CP, short courses);
- Mostly academics in other HE providers...
- ...also includes small number of practitioners (PSRB requirements)
- ...and a handful of examiners with 'other' affiliations
- ...small group of bilingual EEs examining on Greek programmes offered in partnership with Metropolitan College
- Your primary ongoing relationship is with the relevant academic department, but APQO processes appointments, fees and expenses, and answers HR/finance-related queries;
- Sometimes seek EE input on major University initiatives, e.g. new UG framework; University calendar

Sector standards

- **OfS** consultation 2021: ‘high quality courses and reliable standards’; New ‘B’ conditions:
- **B4 Assessment and awards:**
 - students are assessed effectively;
 - each assessment is valid and reliable;
 - academic regulations are designed to ensure awards are credible; and effective assessment of technical proficiency in English language at the appropriate level;
 - awards granted to students are credible at the point they are awarded, and when compared to those granted previously.
- **B5 Sector recognised standards:**
 - the standard of qualifications appropriately reflect applicable sector-recognised standards (FHEQ, degree classification descriptors, PSRB requirements);
 - awards are only granted to students whose knowledge and skills appropriately reflect applicable sector-recognised standards.
- **OfS** does not consider the external examiner system to be an essential element of the assurance of award standards, but...
- **QAA** - External examining review - new guidance is going to restate the purpose and value of external examining, and none of us really want to get rid of the EE system. However, some are re-thinking it.

THE ROLE OF THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER

EEs have a multi-faceted role:

- **guardian of the University's standards:** assurance on consistent application of standards, in line with sector/discipline reference points;
- **checking assessment processes** are rigorous and fair (marking standards, quality of feedback, regulations applied), and measure achievement against learning outcomes;
- **guardian of national standards:** assurance of comparability of award standards and levels of student achievement between institutions (to the best of their knowledge);
- identifying good practice and opportunities for enhancement of the learning experience, as a '**critical friend**'

Reflection: what's the most important aspect for you..?

ROLE OF THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER

“It is my firm belief that an external examiner should be a critical friend and there have been times when I have challenged the [examination] committee, hopefully in a constructive way. I would therefore like to thank all members of the [examination committee] for their patience and good humour when subjected to my opinion...”

- EEs often comment on the willingness of our programme teams to engage in conversations with them about how to make improvements to teaching and assessment.
- Programme teams use EE reports as evidence for annual programme reviews, and we welcome critical analysis/commentary in your reports.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

- Approve draft examination papers and coursework briefs
- Review **samples** of assessed student work, from across the grades
- Attend examination committee
- Write annual report
- (maybe) Attend exhibitions, performances, practical exams or visit students on placement
- (maybe) Visit delivery partner organisation
- (maybe) Meet with students
- (from time to time) Comment on changes to the curriculum
- **Operating remotely again this year**

INTERNAL MODERATION

- **Regulation 3.5 - Fairness in Assessment**
“An auditable system of internal moderation is in place to ensure examiners apply the published marking criteria consistently on taught programmes.”
 - **Quality & Standards Handbook - Assessment & Awards**
Principles governing internal moderation of assessed student work (sampling/ double marking; non-written forms of assessment)
- Samples for internal/external moderation should:
- be representative of every delivery location, and every mode of study;
 - be drawn from, and reflect, the full range of marks, including borderline cases and fail grades;
 - be of an appropriate size with respect to the size of the cohort;
 - include all components of the assessment for the module.
- **Faculty/Department** moderation policies
(or **Partnership** Operations Manual)
Must be clear about the procedure to be followed in order to resolve any disagreement between first and second markers and assign a final mark for a piece of work. Transparency for EE re discussions.
 - **Timescales** - 3 week turnaround for most assignments.

FACULTY POLICIES

- **HLS:** ‘menu’ of five possible approaches to post assessment moderation (depending on type of assessment)
- **OBBS:** includes internal pre-assessment moderation of assignment briefs and a ‘menu’ of seven possible approaches to post-assessment moderation (based on different scenarios)
- **TDE:** Faculty policy on post-assessment moderation, with approved local variations in Schools of Architecture and ECM
- **HSS:** interpretation of University policies (under review)
- **Partnership programmes:** set out in Operations Manual

Reflection: For the sort of assessments that you are responsible for, what insight into the moderation processes is it reasonable for you to expect?

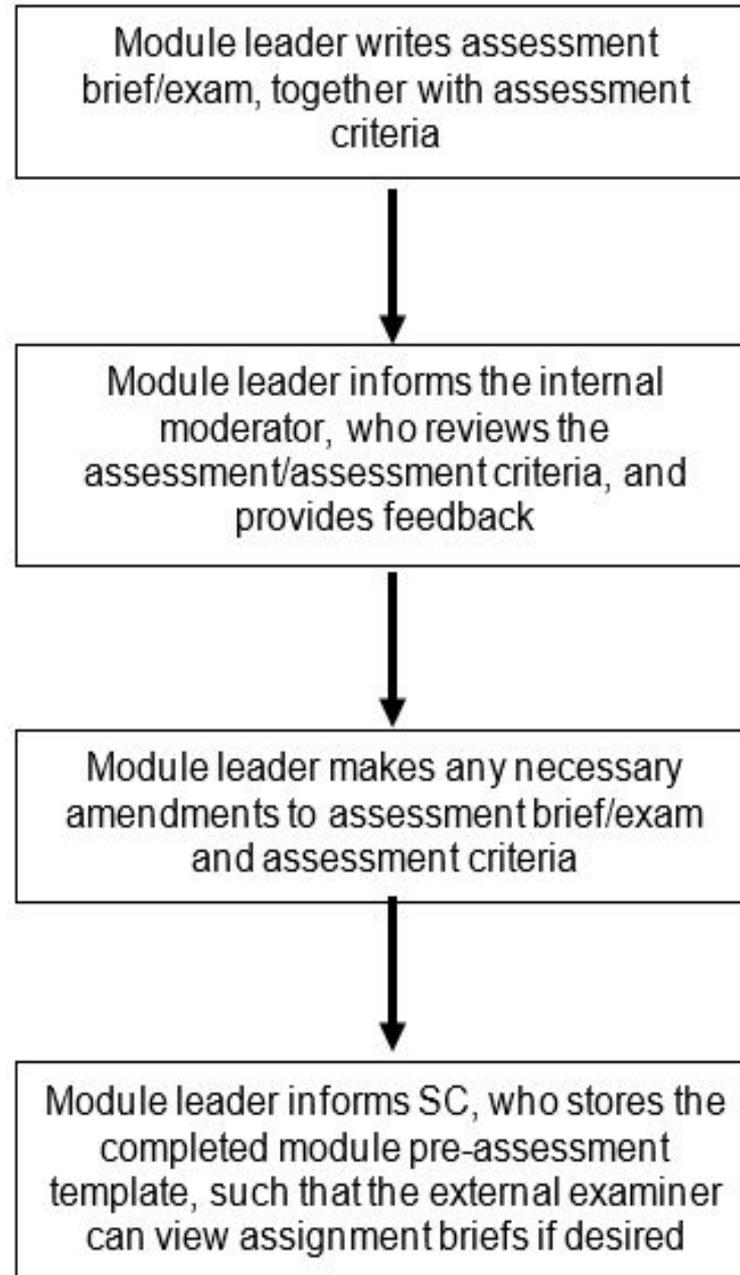
FACULTY APPROACHES TO POST-ASSESSMENT MODERATION

Dr John Jakeman

Head of QA and Validations

Faculty of Health & Life Sciences

Pre-Module Moderation Process



Pre-Moderation Checklist

	Checked (OK/Revise)	Comments	Revision confirmed?
Assessment tasks aligned to module learning outcomes			
Assessment brief checked for spelling/grammar			
Assessment task instructions clearly outlined			
Detail on submission method and deadline clear			
Assessment criteria clear			
Feedback process identified			
Return of work timeline clear			
Identification of eligibility for extensions			
Alternate assessment arrangements clear			

Post-Assessment Moderation Approaches in HLS

- **Approach 1** – where work is marked by a module leader only
- **Approach 2** – where work is marked by a teaching team
- **Approach 3** – where work is double marked and unseen
- **Approach 4** – In-situ assessment based on performance
- **Approach 5** – where practice-based competencies are partially or wholly assessed by staff who are not tutors/lecturers

Module Code:**Module Name:****Module Leader:****Moderator:**

Assignment 1:	Comments
Mean for Assignment SD for Assignment	
Is feedback given related to the criteria?	
Does the feedback indicate how to improve?	

Overall Comments Related to Assessment:	Comments
Number on Module	
Number Successfully completed	
Mean for Module	
SD for Module	

Overall statement on moderated sample	Yes No	Overall Comments Relating to Module
Are you satisfied with the overall standard of student work?		
Are you in overall agreement with the ranking?		
Do have any systematic disagreement with the marker?		
Are you satisfied with the spread of marks?		

THE ANNUAL REPORT

Liz Turner

Deputy Director (Academic Policy & Regulation)

Academic & Student Administration

THE ANNUAL REPORT

- **When** is it due?
- Check with your Programme Lead or Subject Coordinator
- APQO will send general reminders in June (UG) or Dec (PG)
- Report is usually due within a month of examination committee
- **How** do you complete the report?
- Front page asks for details of visits to Brookes/partners/placement providers (for fee calculation purposes)
- YES/NO questions (with or without qualification), relating to:
 - Standards set for the award (pass/fail thresholds)
 - Standards of student achievement
 - Conduct of assessment and award processes
- Do they meet expectations based on your own experience, and in relation to relevant reference points in the sector/discipline/profession?

THE ANNUAL REPORT

- We are also looking for comments on (*in as far as you can judge from the evidence you are provided with, and your conversations with the team/students*):
- **Currency** of the curriculum; and of teaching and learning practices
- The extent to which teams are addressing graduate **employability**
- Suggestions for **enhancement** (strengths and weaknesses)
- **Assessment** and awards – samples of work; standards/consistency of marking and moderation; operation of examination committees
- Are we meeting **professional** expectations and PSRB requirements
- Collaborative arrangements – **comparability** of standards across sites
- Issues for consideration by Faculty or University **Executive** – serious concerns about systemic issues can be reported directly to the V-C
- **Feedback** on your experience

WHAT DO WE DO WITH YOUR REPORT?

- Pay your fee (please send it to externals@brookes.ac.uk)
- Circulated to Programme Lead and Associate Dean for Student Experience, for initial response (within a few weeks)
- Followed up by a copy of the action plan from the Annual Programme Review report (takes place November – January)
- Any concerns about academic or professional standards, or the integrity of the assessment process, triggers immediate action by the Faculty
- Response to wider issues - if raised - will come from appropriate member of senior staff in the Faculty or University
- Annual overview report of all EE reports produced by APQO for the University's senior quality committee (*also provided to the Board of Governors as an appendix to the annual assurance report*)

THEMES FROM EE REPORTS

Commendations:

- breadth and currency of curriculum, incl. interesting specialisms, focus on topical issues, current research, and contemporary professional/industry practice;
- student achievement and graduate employability;
- well-designed assessment strategies and engaging tasks, with focus on assessment for learning; clear briefs, and constructive and supportive feedback;
- enthusiasm and expertise of teaching staff; student centred approaches, and commitment to providing an excellent learning experience;
- rigour and care taken in the assessment process, including marking and feedback, moderation, and the operation of examination committees;
- key role of OBU liaison managers/ buddies in maintaining standards.

Suggestions for improvement:

- Consistency in levels of feedback given on assessed work;
- Assessment workload;
- Timescales for marking and moderation (comments).

FEEDBACK ON THE EXPERIENCE...

- *This certainly has been the best experience (of a number) that I have had as an external examiner. That fact stems from a number of things, including: the way in which my comments or suggestions have always been received positively and treated seriously; the excellent organisation/administration of the marking/exam boards; the wider support for my role as external; and, most of all, the clear commitment of staff to their students, the programme and the standards and rules of the institution.*
- *The exam committee meeting was inclusive and I felt welcomed by the team again this year, the meeting was clearly structured and conducted professionally throughout with adherence and constant consideration of academic regulations. Where necessary, regulations were consulted and shared with all in attendance. Throughout, the teaching team demonstrated a passion for supporting their students and the progression and performance of each student was examined in very good detail.*
- *It has been a real pleasure. The administration is truly exemplary. I have externally examined in a range of institutions and the support given to external examiners is excellent, exceeding everywhere else I have externally examined. The team has always been helpful and responsive. Thank you all for making my term of office so enjoyable.*

INFORMATION & CONTACTS

Academic Policy & Quality Office:

- web pages for external examiners

<https://www.brookes.ac.uk/asa/apqo/external-examining/>

- email

externals@brookes.ac.uk

Academic Standards and External Examiner Dilemmas

Prof. Berry O'Donovan

Oxford Brookes Business School

Academic standards and Quality Standards

- Academic standards: an *output* measure focusing on student achievement.
- Quality standards: *input* and *process* measures focusing on all other aspects of the assessment cycle.

Reflects the revised Quality Code (2018)

Variability in standards

It is easier to gain consistency and effectiveness in quality processes than in academic standards, challenges include:

- Opaque or non-existent marking criteria
- Multiple interpretations of key criteria
- Challenge of articulating and sharing 'level'

Hartog and Rhodes, 1935; Laming et al., 1990; Wolf, 1995; Leach, Neutze and Zepke, 2001; Elander and Hardman, 2002; Newstead, 2002; Baume, Yorke and Coffey, 2004; Norton, 2004; Read et al., 2005; Price, 2005; Shay, 2004 and 2005; Brookes, 2012; O'Hagan and Wigglesworth, 2014; Bloxham et al., 2015 (this is not an exhaustive list)

Expectations

- The academic standards of courses meet the requirement of the relevant national qualifications frameworks
- The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards

Core practices

- The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national standards
- The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.
- Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure...
- The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.

How do Externals get to know the academic standards of their community?

- Experience
- External and Internal Reference Points

Reference Points

Key External Reference Points

- The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
- Qualification characteristics
- Subject benchmark statements
- Outcomes classification descriptions (recent QAA publication)
- Relevant professional standards

Quality Code for UK Higher Education (2018)

Themes in the QC on *External expertise* and *Assessment* are particularly important for external examiners

Plus, of course, *internal reference points* such as assessment policies, regulations, programme specifications, marking criteria etc.

External Examiner Dilemmas

There are no easy answers to these dilemmas. They are constructed for discussion and all are drawn from real situations. So don't worry that you will get the answer 'wrong'. Most solutions have advantages and disadvantages.

In the 'Chat' you will see a link to a Google Document that contains five difficult situations (dilemmas) for you to discuss in breakout groups. Each dilemma is numbered 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5. Discuss the dilemma with the same number as your breakout group (i.e. 1, 2 or 3). If you have time you can then select to discuss either dilemma 4 or 5).

In your breakout group, choose and discuss what you would do in this situation - a number of options are suggested.

You only have 15 minutes, come back prepared to share your thoughts with us all.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1g1OtH2nv2tYriMdFUNtkEWZNXQWR55mx/view?usp=sharing>

EE Dilemmas: discuss in your breakout group which response you would take & why

Dilemma 1

After reviewing a selection of student work on a PG module you agree with the marks. However, these are disappointingly low. You agree with the Module Leader that students have not done well in a key criterion, critical evaluation, but you are concerned that the assessment task does not allow students to demonstrate this attribute. The task demands secondary research skills but not for students to critically evaluate the sourced research. Your concern is increased as you know that critical evaluation of research and advanced scholarship is a key Level 7 attribute that is highlighted in the UK Quality Code.

- A. You decide as it is not students' fault that their marks are low that the assignments should be remarked based on the three other criteria. This does mean that students' final classifications will be delayed.
- B. You suggest that all marks should be lifted by a % that brings the average of this assignment in-line with other module averages across the programme.
- C. As you approved the assignment brief you feel partially responsible. So for this one time you are prepared to allow the marks to stand, but want to ensure that this doesn't happen again by highlighting national reference points with tutors in a professional development session on 'level 7ness'

Dilemma 2

In a sample of Master's dissertations you have access to the first and second markers' original marks and comments, as well as the final agreed mark and feedback sheet. You begin to realise that where there is a significant difference in marks between the first and second marker the final mark is an average of the two. All dissertations marking is carried out by a small number of markers (all research active staff) in a very busy department.

- A. You find this unacceptable. Giving the student a 'compromise' mark may advantage some students whilst disadvantaging others. The mark should be determined according to the quality of the work. You raise it with the exam board.
- B. It seems inevitable that when a small number of staff must mark all the dissertations they will not have time to have detailed discussions. You know that marking is an inexact science and the average mark is as likely to be as accurate as either of that of the two markers so you do not query the marks and approve them.
- C. The Master's programme offers only pass, merit or distinction in the final award. It seems to you that the inaccuracy in marks created by this approach is not significant enough to affect students' final outcomes, so you decide not to make an issue of it.
- D. You suggest that a section be included on the dissertation form that requires an explanation of how the final mark was agreed, in the hope that your inference is wrong or that it will stop the practice of averaging in the future.

Dilemma 3

You have some concern about inconsistency in the marks awarded on a sample of work you have seen. The sample has clear evidence of having been through a moderation process. You ask about the moderation process and the module leader explains that each marker ($n=6$, four of whom are experienced on this module) is asked to provide information about the average and range of marks for their batch of marking ($n=25$). The module leader compares the averages and ranges, and then moderates the batches that are out of line by raising or lowering all marks in a particular batch. The module leader suggests that because markers have a random selection of work to mark rather than the work of their own seminar groups, this system of moderation is acceptable.

- A. Accept that it is likely that each batch will include a typical set of student work so accept the moderation is appropriate.
- B. Request that the non-moderated marks be reinstated because these are more likely to reflect the quality of the work judged using the criteria.
- C. You wonder whether the marking inconsistency has been exacerbated by the two new markers in the team and ask about the average and range of marks for their batches. Marks for these two batches might be changed as a result.
- D. Acknowledge that moderation can be time consuming and comparing averages might be a starting point. But suggest that moderation should also involve comparing the quality of the work.

Dilemma 4

There are two assignments for a level 5 UG module. The tasks are quite complex, but well designed, and far more innovative than many others. They both challenge and engage the students who appear to have learnt a lot. The two assignments assess very different learning outcomes, consequently the criteria being used to frame each assessment are very different. You can see from the marksheet that some students failed to achieve a pass on one assignment but did well on the other. All students have gained over 30% on each assignment and all achieved a pass on the module overall.

- A. You find this unacceptable and request that the work not reaching at least a threshold pass on both assignments should be referred and offered a resit.
- B. Averaging the achievement across assessment tasks is common practice in higher education, you do not regard this as an issue.
- C. Accept the marks, but seek reassurance that the learning outcomes not met will have or will be achieved in other modules.
- D. Accept the marks for this year but request the assessment strategy be changed next year to ensure this doesn't happen again.

Dilemma 5

In an undergraduate programme you review two modules which use student presentations as a summative task. One is in the first year and one in the final year. You notice that the criteria and level descriptors used to mark the presentations are the same. The feedback provided suggests that the students' presentation skills are expected to be a little more developed in the final year but the judgements are still largely based on quite mechanistic factors such as eye contact and voice projection. As a consequence, you think the standard required for the final year module is too low and does not align with the subject benchmark statement.

Consequently, the marks awarded for presentation skills seem to be too high. However, you are concerned that the students may not have understood that an improved quality of work has been expected of them, because the rubric is the same. And you are unaware of any other opportunities that the students have to give presentations between these two instances so you cannot expect the student presentation skills to have greatly improved.

- A. This is too minor an issue to raise. The marks for presentation are unlikely to make a material difference to final honours classifications.
- B. You accept the position for this year as it would be unfair on students to change expectations.
- C. You request that the marks are adjusted (downwards) so that the standards reflect expectations as set out in the benchmark statement.

Reflections

So what were the key issues that came up in your discussion?

What are your reflections on the dilemma?

Any other questions?

THINGS TO ASK YOUR PROGRAMME LEAD

- Where can I find programme and module information, and the previous EE's reports? How will I be updated on changes to the programme/in the Department? How will I be supported in my role? What time commitment is involved, and when?
- At what stage/s will I be involved in the assessment process?
When will I be asked to approve draft assignment briefs/exam papers?
When, and how, can I expect to receive samples of assessed work?
- What information will accompany the samples (module stats, marking schemes, module guides, etc)?
- How will I review non-written assessments (e.g. presentations, performances)?
- Will I be visiting partner organisations, placements, or meeting with students on-campus?
- What processes are in place to ensure the consistency of marking across the programme? How is the internal moderation process documented, and what insight into the moderation processes should I expect?
- When is the examination committee meeting?

THANK YOU

Academic Policy & Quality Office:

- web pages for external examiners

<https://www.brookes.ac.uk/asa/apqo/external-examining/>

- email

externals@brookes.ac.uk